

Amur (Siberian) Tiger

Panthera tigris altaica

Tiger Survival - It is estimated that only 350-450 Amur (Siberian) tigers remain in the wild although there are 650 in captivity. Tigers are poached for their bones and organs, which are prized for their use in traditional medicines. A single tiger can be worth over \$15,000 – more than most poor people in the region make over years. Recent conservation efforts have increased the number of wild Siberian tigers but continued efforts will be needed to ensure their survival.

Can You See Me Now? - Tigers are the most boldly marked cats in the world and although they are easy to see in most zoo settings, their distinctive stripes and coloration provides the camouflage needed for a large predator in the wild. The pattern of stripes on a tigers face is as distinctive as human fingerprints – no two tigers have exactly the same stripe pattern.

Classification

The Amur tiger is one of 9 subspecies of tiger. Three of the 9 subspecies are extinct, and the rest are listed as endangered or critically endangered by the IUCN.

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Felidae

Genus: *Panthera*

Species: *tigris*

Subspecies: *altaica*

Distribution

The tiger's traditional range is through southeastern Siberia, northeast China, the Russian Far East, and northern regions of North Korea.

Habitat

Snow-covered deciduous, coniferous and scrub forests in the mountains.

Physical Description

- Males are 9-12 feet (2.7-3.6 m) long including a two to three foot (60-90 cm) tail; females are up to 9 feet (2.7 m) long.
- Males weigh 400-700 pounds (180-315 kg); females weigh 220-370 pounds (99-166 kg).
- Reddish fur in the summer fading to yellowish color in winter with distinctive brown stripes. The belly fur is creamy white.
- Longer, thicker fur than other tiger species due to the harsh winter conditions in its habitat.
- Largest living cat in the world.

Diet

What Does It Eat?

In the wild: Large hoofed animals like roe deer, sika deer, goat, wild pig, sheep and sometimes domestic livestock.

At the zoo: Special feline diet and bones.

What Eats It?

Tiger cubs may occasionally be eaten by other predators. This animal is a predator at the top of its food chain.

Social Organization

Tigers live and hunt alone except for mating pairs or females with cubs.

Life Cycle

Female tigers are sexually mature at three to four years, males at four to five years. Mating most frequently occurs from November to April and a litter of two to four cubs is born after a gestation of 93-111 days. A female tiger raises her cubs alone. Cubs are born blind and helpless weighing one-and-a-half to three pounds (0.7-1.4 kg). They open their eyes at six to 14 days, nurse for three to six months and can travel with their mother by five to six months. They are taught to hunt by their mother and can hunt for themselves before they are a year old. By the time they are two years old, they can kill large prey on their own but they may stay with their mother for another year or more before leaving to establish their own territory. Half of all cubs do not survive the first two years. Amur tigers may live 15 years in the wild and 20-25 years in captivity.

Adaptations

Can You See Me Now?

Although tigers are easy to see in most zoo settings, their distinctive stripes and coloration provide the camouflage needed for a large predator in the wild. The pattern of stripes on a tigers face is as distinctive as human fingerprints – no two tigers have exactly the same stripe pattern.

Crunch Time!

Tigers have canine teeth four inches long – longer canines than any other predator. Using their big canine teeth and their powerful jaws, tigers can kill prey with one quick bite. Their carnassial teeth (teeth used to shear meat) are adapted for gripping and tearing flesh.

Night Vision

Tigers have highly developed binocular vision, which helps them gauge the distance to prey animals they are chasing. The tapetum lucidum, a mirrorlike layer in the back of the eye, reflects light back through the eye to help produce a brighter image in low light. They see as well as humans in the daytime but at night their sight is five times more acute which allows them to hunt effectively in low light.

My, What Big Claws You Have!

Like most cats, tigers have retractable claws. They usually keep their claws tucked in the fur on their paws. This keeps the claws from wearing down too quickly and also allows them to move silently across hard surfaces when sneaking up on prey. The claws are extended when grabbing prey or scratching an itch.

Conservation Connection

IUCN Status: Critically Endangered.

The remaining five subspecies of tiger are all endangered. It is estimated that only 350-450 Amur (Siberian) tigers remain in the wild although there are 650 in captivity. Tigers are poached for their bones and organs, which are prized for their use in traditional medicines. A single tiger can be worth over \$15,000 – more than most poor people in the region can make in many years. In addition, forestry, mining and road construction are shrinking tiger habitat and range. Overhunting and habitat loss have also reduced the populations of prey animals the tigers depend on. Recent conservation efforts have increased the number of wild Siberian tigers but continued efforts will be needed to ensure their survival.

Fun Facts

- A large tiger can consume up to 100 pounds of food at one time!
- Like housecats, tigers have long whiskers that are like “feelers” helping them find their way in the dark.
- A special reflective layer at the back of the eye called the “tapetum lucidum” increases the tigers’ night vision and also causes their eyes to shine in spotlights.
- Except for jaguars, tigers are the most aquatic of the big cats.
- Their large paws act like snowshoes to help them move through deep snow.
- The name of this cat is taken from the Amur region located along the Chinese-Russian border.
- Largest living cat in the world!